DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 394 951 SP 036 655

AUTHOR Morton, Mary Lou; And Others
TITLE A Variety of Ideal Visions: A Study of Teacher Education.
PUB DATE Oct 95
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association (October 11-14, 1995).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Change; Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Partnerships in Education; *Preservice Teacher Education; Student Research; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Education Programs; Teacher Educators; *Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Idealism

ABSTRACT

A study by teacher education students identified the views on teacher education of 12 professors and administrators involved in teacher education at a large university in the Midwest. It was hoped that these perspectives would provide insights into possible areas of growth and change, and capture various visions of an "ideal" teacher education program. The data, gathered through interviews, were analyzed for common themes and reported as visions and challenges. Common visions were described in terms of "what is" versus "what should be"; perceptions of the type of students in the ideal program; support for the study of multicultural ideas and diverse learners' needs; collaborating in the university community; and quality teaching in both the university and the schools. Challenges were described in terms of a connection between theory and practice; the quality of preservice teachers; the large number of students in the teacher education program; and the lack of focus in the teacher education program. The respondents were enthusiastic about their respective roles in teacher education and idealistic in their visions, and provided insights into the challenges of attaining these visions. They indicated a desire to be involved in working toward a teacher education program that is more in tune with needed reforms in education and society, and they stressed the need for the university to value the time professors need to spend to set up collaborative structures between the university and schools and among university staff members. (Contains 11 references.) (ND)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 394 951

A Vari[illegible] of Ideal Visions:

A Study of Teacher Education

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M L Morton

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Submitted to MWERA by Mary Lou Morton
Additional Researchers: Joan Kavanaugh, Kwee Hiong Ong, Kelly Sputh
10/12/95

SP036655

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

A Variety of Ideal Visions: A Study of Teacher Education

Submitted to MWERA by Mary Lou Morton
Additional Researchers: Joan Kavanaugh, Kwee Hiong Ong, Kelly Sputh
9/18/95

INTRODUCTION

Public school education has become a popular topic of discussion and concern in the last decade and is evidenced in the many reform and restructuring movements such as Goals 2000, The Coalition of Essential Schools, and Modern Red Schoolhouse. Consequently, teacher education programs in colleges and universities have also become topics for concern (Fullan, 1993; Goodlad, 1990; Goodman, 1988, 1982). In fact, Michael Fullan, in Change Forces (p.7), refers to teacher education as "...being the best solution (for changing schools) and the worst problem in education today." John Goodlad points out, in Teachers For Our Nation's Schools, "...that institutional mission, leadership, organization, and commitment with respect to teacher education fall short of the necessary conditions (for effectiveness)..." (p. 151).

The objective of this study was to identify the respective viewpoints of selected professors and administrators involved in teacher education at a large university in the midwest. The concerns mentioned

above were represented in our findings as well. Although there is extensive publicity in the media, research publications, and books that expounds on the problems with schools and teachers, these researchers agree with Sarason, Davidson and Blatt (1986) that teacher education is still "an unstudied problem". In order to contribute to developing a cohesive program, it was hoped that by surveying what perspectives are represented by those involved in teacher education, we may illuminate valuable insights into possible areas of growth and change.

While carrying out this research, we were hoping to identify commonalities as well as differences among individual visions. Throughout this project, our efforts were spent capturing various visions of an "ideal" teacher education program. We recognized that by conducting this study in the school of education as education students, our group brings its own personal biases of what an ideal teacher education program would include. Our collaboration in the research also involved helping each other remain as objective as possible about information we collected.

For the purposes of our study, we defined "vision" to be the "big picture" that would include the practices, methods, and ideals in a teacher education program on the university level. This program would be to prepare students to be successful teachers in today's schools which would

mean being able to also deal with the changes taking place as referred to earlier. Our questions were planned to obtain responses about visions of "an ideal" program, as well as, point out the challenges inherent in reaching that vision in a large university setting.

The following questions were asked of each interviewee:

- Tell me about your role in teacher education at this university.
- What is your vision of an ideal teacher education program?
- What would it take to implement this vision at a university?
- What would be the major challenges in working toward your vision?

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The subjects chosen for this study were faculty and staff involved in teacher education at one university. The researchers attempted to interview a selection of people who would represent a wide variety of views of what an ideal teacher education program would look like. Our sample included seven male and five female respondents. Four of these respondents have been at the University for fewer than five years, three have been there between five and ten years, and five respondents have been there for more that ten years. Seven respondents taught both

undergraduate and graduate classes in education; five people had other roles such as working with admission, placement, and supervision of teacher educators on the graduate as well as preservice levels.

Each of the four interviewers used a tape recorder to conduct three approximately fifteen-minute-long interviews. Each taped interview was transcribed. The transcriptions, the rough draft, and the final paper of the written research were returned to the respondents. The respondents' resultant comments, suggestions, and corrections were welcomed and incorporated in the final paper.

The responses were studied for major themes and commonalities. First, each interviewer sorted her respondents' comments into categories then the responses were studied by the four of us together. Our themes emerged as we engaged in peer debriefing, studied member checks, clarified with respondents, and reviewed relevant literature. The various categories were then compared and contrasted and later synthesized into five main themes that were the most frequently cited topics and ones that seemed to be interrelated. These will be explained in the results section.

RESEARCH RESULTS: VISIONS

1."What is" Versus "What should be"

As our respondents shared their perspectives on teacher education, there seemed to be a common thought that it was necessary to look at "what is" in the present teacher education program and consider "what should be" in an ideal program at some future point in time. Although our respondents came from diverse backgrounds in education and held a variety of positions in the teacher education program, they shared a common vision that there needs to be a strong, cohesive teacher education program in order to prepare future teachers for what they will face when they enter the teaching realm. How to deal with effecting changes for "what should be" was a common concern.

Dealing with the societal and school changes will require a deeper commitment and involvement on the part of the university, says one interviewee. He explains, "I would like to see a program that is extended over time and has more depth to teacher education than we normally have. If anything, I would like to see us increase the depth we have in the school of education and our contact with students as opposed to reducing it. I think that many other people would argue that we need fewer courses in education and more courses in substantive disciplines. And I would opt for

the other direction." According to this respondent, being able to be an effective teacher requires more than just causing students to accumulate content or knowledge, it requires an ongoing educative development on the part of the faculty and students at a university.

2. Type of University Students Perceived in Visions

From our interviews we found that many of our respondents share a common vision of the type of teachers needed to face the challenges in schools and communities. Their belief is that pre-service teachers need to be thoughtful, reflective, and articulate students. One respondent explained this viewpoint by saying, "Teacher education, from my perspective, is a time prior to one becoming a teacher and a time that you afford them (students) the opportunity to think about what it means to teach. You think about what it means to learn, think about what kinds of relationships you want to have with kids, ...about what they think is important in educating children, ...before they start their jobs as teachers. Let's engage these people into some conversations about these topics and hope that they'll become more thoughtful about them as teachers."

Another respondent shared a similar belief by stating, "I have never felt as if I could teach anyone how to teach and I haven't really wanted to.

My whole focus is to teach people how to think about teaching." If students are taught to reflect and think in their teacher education programs, then they will become better teachers out in the field."

Several of our respondents expressed their vision of a teacher education program as one which would produce independent and responsible students. Some respondents also mentioned the need to empower students to have more control over their programs. One person explains his perspective by describing his performance-based program: "We help them (pre-service teachers) to learn that students in schools ought to have more control over their education and we do that by giving them more control over their education..." This program encourages students to become self-directed learners and choose their own methods to meet the criteria for completing their programs.

3. Education for Diverse Learners: Multicultural and Special Needs

Most interviewees expressed strong support for study of multicultural ideas and diverse learning needs in their visions. Many respondents pointed out that teacher education programs need to explore differences among students not only in terms of intellectual capabilities,

but also backgrounds and life experiences. As one respondent explained, teacher preparation programs need to be committed to working with culturally diverse students, " I think we have to be committed to democracy and what it means in the twenty-first century. It's going to be more pluralistic."

Another respondent stressed the need to prepare teachers who will be comfortable with various ability levels due to the trend to include special-needs students in the regular classroom. Teachers need to feel comfortable helping all students learn.

4. Collaborating in the University Community

Many respondents discussed the need to develop more positive university/school relationships. One interviewee expounded on the importance of respecting the knowledge and experience of the classroom teacher in the school community. He believed that we must turn more control over to the teacher in the community where the students are placed to make decisions on their experience which pre-service teachers receive. He stated, that the university needs to say, "We are guests in your classroom and would like for you to tell us what would be the kind of experiences that (university) students ought to get." Other interviewees

carried the collaboration beyond graduation to continued contact during the first years of teaching when the new teacher needs support.

This collaboration is viewed as a need among faculty and staff at the university as well. Even though many different ideal visions for teacher education were purported, there was a concern expressed by the majority of interviewees that sharing their vision and helping each other work toward creating new programs or courses of study is vital. This collaboration can contribute to being able to create some new types of programs. Creating interdisciplinary programs is one topic believed to be important in order to provide experiences so teachers will use interdisciplinary teaching methods in their classrooms.

5. Quality Teaching

Concerns were expressed for quality teaching in the university and the schools. A few respondents stated that their vision would include high expectations for teacher educators to meet qualifications without exceptions and be dedicated to their studies. One person stated that, "I am very encouraged at our institution by the quality of people that we are bringing in as the faculty." Another enlarges upon this thought by saying, "...we often ignore the fact that we can't separate programs from people;

the quality of the program is infinitely tied to the quality of the people that are both teaching it and those that are students."

CHALLENGES

1. Connection Between Theory and Practice

One of the major challenges to implementing a vision is the concern about making a connection between theory and practice: what does research seem to tell us yet what can be applied in classrooms? This concern was exemplified in the following quote: "...it (a teacher education program) would combine some elements of our knowledge of the theory--education theory or teaching theory, with appropriate practical experiences so that our graduates not only understand what they do, but also why they do it."

Many respondents expressed a concern about the need to reconsider the actual classroom experience which pre-service teachers get prior to student teaching. One respondent is a strong advocate of practical classroom experience in the schools. She stated, "I think that exposure, early exposure I should say, to the classroom is the one place that we maybe need to do more of." Other interviewees expressed the need for early experience in the classroom because it enables students to build a

bridge between what they are learning at the university (theory) and what they experience in the classroom (practice).

2. Quality of Preservice Teachers

There was serious concern about the quality of pre-service teachers in the teacher education program. Several respondents stated that part of a successful teacher education program is having thoughtful and articulate students. One respondent said, "Students have a tremendous impact on the quality of the teacher education program...if you have thoughtful and good students, we'll have a much better program than if you don't have serious and thoughtful students who really apply themselves." Along with this, another respondent explained, "...if you have students...who were determined and dedicated to becoming a teacher, then you will have an ideal program." The key to this particular participant's vision is attracting enthusiastic students to the program.

Another interviewee commented on the carry-over of enthusiasm to teaching. He explained, "Exciting teachers breathe life into the world of ideas and make strong connections with their students." The voices of these three respondents reflected the common concern that the teacher education program needs quality students and faculty to support itself.

3. Large Numbers of Students

A major challenge facing the teacher education program is the large number of students in it. Different respondents refer to the approximately 2,000 students needing to be placed in field experiences and student teaching each year. It was suggested that much fragmentation of curriculum occurs when a university has to deal with such large numbers. Experiences may be duplicated in some instances and in others they may be left out. As one respondent lamented, "I feel out of touch with most of the people who go through the program. I feel like a tiny cog in a big machine and I am not sure where this machine starts and ends. I would like to be able to know students through more than one course to see their progress and get to know them as individual people."

Again, cohort groups are suggested as a solution. One respondent explained that a proposed cohort group of pre-service teachers would "encourage a sense of community, a greater sense that they actually would know what each other was doing because they will have a small enough group that they can talk to each other." This cohort group, it was suggested, would advance as a group through an area of concentration as multicultural studies or social studies.

4. Lack of Focus

Many of the respondents expressed a belief that the teacher education program has a lack of focus. Goodlad (1991) found that there was a "general failure to connect schooling and teacher education that deprives teacher education of a mission...we looked to the nature of education and the role of schools in seeking to define a mission for teacher education..." (p.55). He points out that there is a disconnection between the type of teacher the school needs and the type of teacher an educational program produces. According to Goodlad, this results in a lack of a unified vision. Several respondents expressed a similar idea. For instance, one interviewee stated, "I think it's (the teacher education program) missing a thematic focus, or even larger that--a visionary focus."

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

We were impressed by the enthusiasm that our respondents displayed for their respective roles in teacher education. They were idealistic in their visions and insightful into the challenges of meeting these visions in a large research-oriented university. A task force to

study teacher education has been instituted and is viewed by many respondents as a hopeful vehicle through which to consider the challenges of building an effective program. One of the goals of the task force is to create an openness and enthusiasm toward making changes in the education program.

Changing mindsets about the way things have always been done in order to restructure teacher education is a major challenge. The visions we had the pleasure to document present exciting ideas to contibute to a dynamic teacher education program that will require time for collaboration among faculty members, a willingness to care about the program as a whole, and a university support and reward system to recognize people for their efforts. There exists the constant tension

between preparing teachers to succeed in schools as they are,[1234] yet stimulating ideas that will help contribute to making changes in schools to look more like what research suggests ought to be in order to provide for more successful learning experiences. Almost every topic that arose as an issue in our respondents' visions of a teacher education program, could be linked to two conflicts: theory versus practice and "what is" versus "what could" or "what should be".

Most of the respondents, during their interviews, discussed their visions and ideas as applied to their university. Although the ideas expressed were specific to this situation, the literature we reviewed indicates similar concerns in other teacher education programs. Therefore, we believe many of the issues would be transferable to other settings, especially large research universities.

Our interviews revealed a desire by the participants to be involved in working toward a teacher education program that is more in-tune with needed changes and reforms in schooling and society. Even the physical layout of the school of education discourages collaboration and suggestions have been made to improve on this. Of utmost importance is the need for the political climate of the university to value the time professors need to spend to set up collaborative structures between the

university and schools and among university staff members. Reward systems need to support this "people work" which is so crucial to the success of a university's programs as well as rewarding individual research or changes may not occur. It is hoped that the teacher education task force will provide the opportunity to begin serious collaboration among faculty and staff. This holds much promise for creating an on-going, improving vision for teacher education.

REFERENCES

Fullan, Michael (1993). Change forces: probing the depths of educational reform. Bristol, Pa.: Falmer Press.

Gay, Geneva (1994). At the essences of learning: multicultural education. West Lafayette, Indiana: Kappa Delta Pi.

Goodlad, John (1990). Teachers for our nation's schools. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Goodlad, John (1991). "Why we need a complete redesign of teacher education." Educational Leadership, 49, 3, pp. 4-10.

Goodman, Jesse (1988). "University culture and the problems of reforming field experiences in teacher education." Journal of Teacher Education, 39, pp. 45-51.

Gosbert, Jake (1995). "Transitions in teaching force school of education to adapt." Indiana Daily Student, February 28, 1995.

Gregory, Tom (1993). "A community of teachers: personalized teacher education at Indiana University." Personal Document.

Merriam, Sharan B. (1988). Case study research in education: A qualitative approach. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (1992). Standards, procedures, and policies for the accreditation of professional education units. Washington D. C.: NCATE.

Noddings, Nel (1992). The challenge to care in schools: Alternative approach to education. New York: Teachers College Press.

Sarason, S. B., Davidson K., & Blatt, B. (1986). The preparation of teachers: An unstudied problem in education. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books, Inc.